



# Podcast Transcript: A Statewide Approach to Language Proficiency and Assessment

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**Olani Lilly:** Aloha, and welcome to the second podcast of the Native American Language Resource Center Summer Series on How to Create an Immersion School. I am Olani Lilly, and today I'm here with Kau'i Sang from the Hawaii Department of Education Office of Hawaiian Education. She'll be sharing her expertise in developing statewide structures for native language learning and proficiencies. Welcome, Kau'i.

**Kau'i Sang:** Aloha mai kākou `Owau kēia Kau'i Sang he kupa `āina wau no Waimānalo he āina ho'opulapula. Hana'i ia wau ke `ike o ka `ohana me kekahi i kekahi. Aia o Waimanalō, ma ka mokupuni o O'ahu, O'ahu o Kakūhihewa. He pukana wau me ka `oihana me nā kula aupuni o Hawai'i. `O Haulani ka'u makuakane a `O Ululani ka'u makuahine. He mau Hawai'i lāua. A`ole lāua e `Ōlelo Hawai'i. Aulike ana, mawaina o ka po'e o `iwi o America, e ka ipu kākou no ke ki'i ako i ka lanakila ke `ea o ka po'e o `iwi ho'i. Aloha, my name is Kau'i Sang, and I am a keiki o ka `āina from Waimānalo, the community and the family that raised and taught me the value of what it means to be a part of a community, what it means to be a part of a family, a strong `Ohana structure. I am a graduate of our public education system here in Hawai'i and am raised by my parents, Haulani Sang and Ululani Kupahu, both of who were raised by their parents in various Hawaiian ways of knowing and thinking but without `Ōlelo Hawai'i.

**Olani Lilly:** Thank you so much for joining us. I reached out to Kau'i because I think she has a really unique perspective in the sense of being very connected to her place, her culture, and her language, but playing within a larger landscape around education within the state of Hawai'i and really brings that heart and that passion to that work. As we get into the work, I just wanted to ask if you could tell us how your work meets a need within the Native language immersion community.

**Kau'i Sang:** In Hawai'i, the public education system is a single SEA (state education agency)/LEA (local education agency) entity that provides education through both Department of Education schools and public charter schools. My office, the Office of Hawaiian Education, or OHE, is situated at the state level of the Department of Education. My office was established within the state level only a few years ago, 2015. We're currently sunseting our second delivery plan, which focuses on a mission to ground the public education system in Hawai'i to Hawaiian ways of knowing so that all of Hawai'i lives. And so within that context, I think the work that we do as an office is to make space so that our Kaiapuni Program, our Hawaiian Language Immersion Program can find parity within a system that honors both languages and hopefully works towards a full establishment of a

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dual language pathway system where `Ōlelo Hawai'i is elevated and viewed within the community as one of the premier education programs of the Department of Education. And so, the role that I play in that really starts with sort of a self definition of the responsibilities that we have, recognizing that there wasn't real precedence to follow before 2015. My role has sort of evolved over the time since the office opened in 2015, but most of the focus has been around seeking that parity for `Ōlelo Hawai'i and doing different things in the system in order to reach that parity. Our work really sits on the shoulders of, you know, trailblazing Hawaiian language experts of the early 1970s who fought to make space and who broke the seal of access to public education for `Ōlelo Hawai'i back in '87 with the establishment of our first Kaiapuni schools. OHE intends to innovate the system and the methodology of `Ohana as a practice that informs how we should behave as a system. And, so, we're working towards doing that.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, that's amazing. I mean, we're talking about assessment, right, and assessment of language of `Ōlelo Hawai'i within the context of like an immersion school. But really, you know, sometimes assessment and student learning standards can really drive, um, mindset change. And so, I was wondering, I wanted to ask you about like, why did Hawai'i engage and start the journey, I guess, to take ownership over their own assessments and data?

**Kau'i Sang:** You know, I moved up to the state office, mmm, back in like, I don't remember, maybe like 2007, 2006-2007. And at that time, coming out of the school, I think we started to feel the strong effects of what was happening to our students relative to standardized assessment. And then the department really needed to sort of be in compliance with federal policy. And so, sort of shift their practice, right? Because the measurements were defined by a community that was external to Kaiapuni, that was external to the language of our community. And so, that was a, one of, the biggest challenges because we were no longer able to control what success outcomes looked like in a Kaiapuni learning environment.

**Olani Lilly:** And so, could you share a little bit about how "the why" informed like the paths you took and the decisions you made in developing that statewide immersion assessment?

**Kau'i Sang:** It's not a task that's born on the shoulders of a single person.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** We know that our Kaiapuni schools are only successful because of `Ohana, because of the families that put their kids into the program, because of the commitment and sort of the awamo, the carrying of kuleana that doesn't have to rest on the shoulders of a single person. The preservation of that method was super important. Lifting up the voices of all of the stakeholders so that we were always on the same page about why Kaiapuni education matters to the folks that commit their students to us really kind of started to cinch up, if you will, some of the gaps that were created relative to this compliance issue. The reestablishment of the 'Aha Kauleo allowed us



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to bring those voices back. Teachers, the school administrators, our community supporters, sort of a council...

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** ...of representative voices from all of the schools across the state.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, and so, I mean, with that, how did you engage that broader stakeholder group in the process of developing your assessment, and why did you do the things you did?

**Kau'i Sang:** Just yesterday, um, the Office of Hawaiian Education held its first meeting to work towards, um, building a kindergarten entry assessment.

**Olani Lilly:** Nice.

**Kau'i Sang:** The state mandated that all students entering kindergarten starting this fall are tested for readiness, kindergarten readiness. And there is no kindergarten readiness assessment right now.

**Olani Lilly:** Right.

**Kau'i Sang:** And so, the best thing for us to do was to actually follow precedents. You know, we're still working through some of the teams within the community on how to get there.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** But I think generally, with the Kaiapuni assessment on educational outcomes, the one that we currently use for assessing for federal accountability for students in Kaiapuni, for grades three to eight, there's already a practice and a protocol to do that.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** And so, we tapped back into that practice and protocol and said, how do we do this? And so, there's a theory of action that was drafted by the team that currently maintains our assessment goals and that theory of action speaks to an essential element of our practice is to convene those voices.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** And so, when we set up the process, the how to get to the end, we make sure that including in authentic and genuine ways, the voices of those folks that are actually in the practice. And so yesterday, the room was filled...



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**Olani Lilly:** Awesome.

**Kau'i Sang:** ...because it's a kindergarten readiness assessment, was filled with kindergarten teachers.

**Olani Lilly:** Awesome.

**Kau'i Sang:** You know, there's invitations made to experts. There's invitations made to community members to participate. And, we start the meeting off by acknowledging that they are the SMEs (subject matter experts) in the room. We had to turn to the folks that were doing the work. The other part of sort of this process, though, also includes open communication with the community. If there are questions that they have, those questions can be addressed.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, and you know, as an administrator for a school that was having teachers involved in that assessment process, I think you folks also provided like the support and resources to pull those teachers out, you know, of the classroom, to have them be engaged in a meaningful way. And then the comeback to the school was really huge, you know. The discussions teachers had in developing and working with you folks on that assessment really fed back to the school. I don't know if you guys thought about that, but it was a really a professional development.

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah, yeah, for sure. And we continue to hear that all the time.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** But it makes sense though, because teachers are talking about things that teachers should be talking about.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** As the experts of that work, our teachers are even the ones that come back into score assessment, write new assessment items.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** We always have this pool of product that can keep and sustain the assessment itself. But, in the process of doing that and continuing to invite those voices, we're getting teachers to focus in on the standards. We're getting teachers to have conversation about those standards. And we're getting teachers to challenge whether or not those standards should still be setting...

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.



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**Kau'i Sang:** ...what we do in front of us because they're seeing what's happening in the classrooms, right?

**Olani Lilly:** Right.

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah, and, you know, I used to be mentored by Dr. Noelle Warner when I was a kindergarten teacher back in, forever ago. One of the, the sort of outputs of his work was to be able to expand the degree to which 'Ōlelo Hawai'i is being used in classrooms at earlier grades. And when I talk about expand, I think as a Hawaiian language speaker, I feel like my language could be viewed as very basic because I use the same sort of vocabulary in my speech all the time. But, you know, Dr. Warner's work was trying to make sure that we could expand into multiple contexts and use the vocabulary that was maybe speaking to the same idea, but in a more detailed or directed way. And so, through these kinds of processes, I think it informs not sort of just where we're at, but also where we could continue to go to as we start to, as we start to build this out even more.

**Olani Lilly:** And I guess, I mean, which sort of leads me back to circle back to this question about like, what sort of spurred the state to start to think about creating these standards that you're working on as well as the assessment?

**Kau'i Sang:** I think sort of the catalyst for "okay, let's pay attention now" was again, driven by families, driven by the community. That's when the department said, "let's try to figure out what can we do."

**Olani Lilly:** Mhm.

**Kau'i Sang:** The superintendent at the time was Kathy Matayoshi. And I remember sitting in a room with her and the board chair at the time, Don Warner, when they told us, "We're gonna give you guys the decision-making authority to define, and we're gonna advocate that you guys get the funding to do that." And, so, there was an allocation of \$3 million at the time to start the process. And so, it did require a little bit of push from the community and then a little bit of pull from the department...

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** ...to get the resources in place. I have to, I have to acknowledge right now in this podcast that Dr. Kalihua Krug was a beast...

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** ...taking on that task as the PI. And he took on the challenge wholeheartedly and started the process with teachers for standards development, and then working into standing up the KĀ'EO (Kaiapuni Assessment of Education Outcomes) assessment. And then I also want to acknowledge here Dr. Pohaikutea Schultz, who has taken the reins since his departure from the



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University and has continued to maintain the quality of the assessment and the commitment to seek full peer review and we're, it's close to full peer review.

**Olani Lilly:** Amazing. Sorry, I just got to breathe through that one.

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah, yeah. I want to acknowledge here that they were both parents of Kaiapuni students as well.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** Right. And so, going back to this concept of Ohana, the commitment to make it work for ourselves, I mean, people were just all in.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, the right people and the right time and the right push and the right pull sort of all came together like that tipping point thing and they were there.

**Kau'i Sang:** If you're going to give it to us, we're going to get it done.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah, yeah, I mean, when the first Aha Pūnana Leo started, right, I know they had that dream, right? They had that dream about renormalizing ʻŌlelo Hawai'i, but you know, just in those 38 years of immersion.

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah.

**Olani Lilly:** So, that's awesome. Thank you again for sharing "the why" and "the we" and how you engage that. I wanted to sort of transition our conversation into a little bit more nuts and bolts on the how, both on the standards that you are now sort of pushing out to the larger system of education in the state of Hawaii, as well as the immersion. So, kind of talking about those two things, you have covered a lot of like the hows for the immersion assessment creation, but maybe take a step and look at the work you're doing around standards and how you have those standards be adopted by a statewide system of education.

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah. Which is huge, right? I mean, it's huge. You know, back in 2013, 2014, when we were given the opportunity to take control of our own narrative, the first thing we had to do was question whether or not we knew what was going on in our school. And so, we had to ask that of teachers, like, what's going on in their classrooms? Because we couldn't set the target too high, or we couldn't set the target too low. And we needed to get to some kind of consensus about where we were, what was informing the practice, what's the mo'okū `auhau of that work, is it intended to elevate and strengthen the language proficiency of our students? Is it intended to do something else? And to ask all of those questions of our teachers. And then we had to shoot at the target, like where's the middle of that? Where's the floor, where's the ceiling, and where's the middle? And how do we start to think about where to start building those standards? And we did that without even considering sort of the broader set of standards of the department, which was at the time





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Common Core. We said we're not going to look at Common Core at all. Because if we look at that, our guess was that we were already closer to mimicking that in practice than not. And so, we started with that conversation with teachers, and then we began drafting based on the input that we got from teachers and some sort of back and forth with those teachers, and then started to vet the first draft of it, not just with teachers, but also with language experts, of course, our parents and the folks in the `Aha Kauleo, which led up to a final draft. Once we had that final draft, then the actual work had to start around validating that set of standards within the context of federal compliance and making sure that our mo'olelo, our story that we told about the drafting of those standards could make sense to the folks that were going to review our assessment. Title I says single set of standards, the same set of standards for all kids. We had to make sure that there was a presence or there was a way to articulate the single set of standards. The first attempt at the peer review was a partial pass. And then we're even closer to full, fully meeting in the second peer review. We're going back in next year and prepping some of the things in order to hopefully get full peer review. And so, I think the nuts and bolts of that is like focusing in on, okay, what are we trying to get to in the short term? And why? And then the next step is then to readdress the question of standards. I'm excited because we're starting a process to investigate the distance between our Hawaiian language art standards and our English language art standards. I think we're trying to influence the way language arts is viewed at a public policy level and asking whether or not we should be defining our standards as English language arts standards or language arts standards. Just language arts, yeah. And so that's the work that we're moving into and we're inviting sort of a bigger group of folks, not just now continuing the conversation to Kaiapuni, but also to say like, hey, those folks that are English language medium schools, how do we create the crosswalks together so that we can identify what is happening in all schools for all, and what is not happening in all schools for all?

**Olani Lilly:** Prior to this, we had been on a live session and there was lots of questions around like immersion assessment. And I think some people just think it's all just about assessing language, but it's not. I mean, it's, and correct me if I'm wrong, it's assessing content knowledge and what's provided in instruction. So just like another assessment, it's doing math and is science now a piece of the assessment and then language arts, right?

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah. For our Hawaiian language immersion community, what we're doing relative to federal assessment is testing students in grades three to eight for Hawaiian language arts. We're testing students in grades three to eight for our Common Core Math Standards. And the reason why we're doing Common Core Math Standards is because that is what the teachers said should be done. The ask was to just translate Common Core Math, and so that's what we did. And then for science, we took a whole different approach. We actually brought in environmentalists, Aina-based educators that are focused in on sort of those practices. And we asked them, what does Hawaiian science look like? And that was the first step. We actually cross-walked back to the state standard, which is currently the next generation science standards. And so there is a set of science standards for our Kaiapuni schools that we assess for in federal assessment package.



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**Olani Lilly:** Yeah. So, I mean, we were talking a lot about who you brought together, how you brought them together, how you were engaging them from a real inclusive and collaborative process. But you mentioned there's a whole technical side, right, to this?

**Kau'i Sang:** Yeah, yeah. So, it's worked through our Assessment Accountability Branch. They're the office that maintains the work around all assessments for the Department of Education. They're the ones that host the MOU between the Department of Education and the University of Hawaii at Manoa for the KĀ'EO assessment. And they're the ones that help agendaize the steps that KĀ'EO needs to follow to meet federal compliance. A technical advisory community meeting, where reviewers will take a look at the technical qualities of the assessment and then offer input on how to adjust left and right. In terms of trailblazing work, I would say that they're having to be the one that sets precedence for what could be relative to an assessment tool for content knowledge and skills to meet federal accountability. But we participate in that. There are reports that have to be met every year. Students and families and schools have to get those same kinds of assessment of result reports through the system. The communication of supports to schools on how to administer the test goes through the same process as our English assessments. And so all of those systems are already set up to sort of maintain themselves, if you will.

**Olani Lilly:** Amazing. And amazing too that there's this whole other field around like psychometrician and Indigenous psychometrician-ing, I guess. Awesome. So is the assessment, this is just some nuts and bolts, is the assessment written?

**Kau'i Sang:** It's an online assessment. The kids take the test online. They have to produce speech and record. There's listening and then responding to prompts, input, multiple choice. There might be extended responses, drag and drop, all of that. The KĀ'EO team has contracted with platform developers to make sure that they were providing a tactile opportunity so that it could meet the same formats as what students in the English program would experience as well. Awesome.

**Olani Lilly:** Awesome. And that's given once a year, is that right?

**Kau'i Sang:** It is a summative assessment, so yes, once a year.

**Olani Lilly:** Then there's a report that comes out. What happens with that student learning data once that report is created?

**Kau'i Sang:** Yes, I personally have not had any conversations with families on how they interact with the data from the reports. I know that as a parent, I received the report and so I could have conversations with my own child about what the report was saying about their learning. In terms of what happens as a school, I've definitely seen schools look at the data and look at the trends in the data. I think COVID was a super big eye-opener for everybody, right? What's interesting was that the trend was the same. I mean, in terms of the dip and then in terms of the gains, the





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recovery rate, comparing Native Hawaiian population of students in Kaiapuni against Native Hawaiian population in non-Kaipuni, of how they were performing in terms of their recovery. It looked like the gains were a little bit higher for Native Hawaiian population within Kaiapuni, which is exciting. It was exciting information. So, we, at the state office, we look at those aggregates like oh what are the big trends? But at the school level, I heard from schools who have said, we're having data team conversations about what this data is saying. And we're asking what are the formative assessment tools now that become essential? That's sparked a whole other line of work within our office with our champion, Aulia Austin, who is driving to make sure that we have a formative assessment tool in `Ōlelo Hawai'i now. So, we're working towards that, a language screening tool.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah. I mean, it just goes to show all the work around how much assessment and thinking about learning standards really sets the foundation for real key decisions you have to make along the path. That's a lever of empowerment, right? Just amazing, amazing.

**Kau'i Sang:** True. While this work definitely excites me and keeps us on our toes to move and strengthen the program.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** I also don't want to project a message that this is where all of the work should be. I think we're trying to do something far bigger than sort of this model of education whose distance is only really short between what we do in Western schools and what we do at Kaiapuni schools. I think we are trying to push our program closer to what a community-based model might look like...

**Olani Lilly:** Right.

**Kau'i Sang:** ...when all stakeholders of a community are contributing the gifts that we bring to sustain a community and getting our students into the practice of being able to sit in front of masters.

**Olani Lilly:** Yeah.

**Kau'i Sang:** In a different way and so I feel like you know at Ka'Umeke, they are so close to that. And, I'm going to point to your work as well and say that's why those schools are important.

**Olani Lilly:** You know the work that you've been doing around like valuing practitioners, valuing teachers as being a real key part of the educational system, and community people and family as being the first educators and the ongoing educators, and how you're blending that all into this very formal structure of statewide education is exciting and definitely a model. Just to sort of wrap



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up this amazing conversation is with your work, um, what do you think the implications of the work that you and others have been doing could be for other states and at the federal level?

**Kau'i Sang:** The work that you're doing has to get to the point where these folks are able to sustain themselves in their own communities, in their own languages. Keeping that sort of as a focus point, asking the kinds of questions that will make sure that their voices are heard and that those voices inform decision-making protocols are going to be super important. And so, if you really want to focus in on what's good for Indigenous learners, you should ask the Indigenous community. Yeah, you should elevate the voices of the Indigenous community.

**Olani Lilly:** Mahalo to you, Kau'i, for again, for sharing the amazing work that you're doing and the way that you are really like moving the state of Hawai'i educational system to a place that is Hawai'i. And not just based on race or ethnicity, but because we love this place, whoever we are, and we want to be a part of that place. So, thank you.